

STAFFORD COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Agenda Consideration

TOPIC: Pupil Transportation
Action Plan Annual Update

ITEM NO: 10D

PREPARED BY: Larry Himes
Director of Pupil
Transportation

MEETING: June 15, 2004

ACTION DATE: Information Only

Andre' A. Nougaret 
Assistant Superintendent
for Support Services

ACTION REQUESTED BY THE SUPERINTENDENT: That the School Board receive for information an implementation update of the Pupil Transportation Plan for Improvement initiated in June 2003 as a result of a VASS study.

KEY POINTS:

- Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) Peer Visiting Team conducted a comprehensive study of the Pupil Transportation Department in the spring of 2003.
- While the team noted important departmental strengths, recommendations for improvement were made in the following broad areas:
 - Policy and Procedures
 - Communication
 - Efficiency and Effectiveness
- An improvement plan was developed with accompanying implementation schedule.
- A mid-year progress report was shared with the Board via School Board News in February 2004.
- A calendar year has passed since an action plan was implemented and we proudly present a summary of outcomes implemented and those contemplated.

SCHOOL BOARD GOAL:

Goal 4: Address the impact of continuing population growth by developing plans to address expanding staff, facilities, transportation, attendance zones, and instruction.

FUNDING SOURCE: N/A

AUTHORIZATION REFERENCE: N/A

**Stafford County Public Schools
Department of Pupil Transportation
VASS Progress Report**

June 15, 2004

As previously reported, in January 2003, a peer visiting team organized by the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) conducted an on-site visit for the purpose of completing a comprehensive review of the Department of Pupil Transportation. The final report provided commendations and specific recommendations for improvement of the Pupil Transportation Department. The progress and accomplishments that have been made to date and of those areas that continue to be under development are presented to you in this update.

Specific areas identified for review were:

- * **Communication**
- * **Efficiency and Effectiveness**
- * **Policies and Procedures**

1) Communication

Accomplishments:

- a) Daily bus changes are communicated to each school via Group Wise Email.
- b) A multi-line telephone system has been installed and provides the capability for citizens to retrieve information concerning late buses.
- c) A full-time receptionist is available to provide an immediate response to citizen inquiries. As the normal operating hours of the Transportation Department are from 6:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., a part-time receptionist position has been approved in the FY 2005 budget. The approval of the part-time position will greatly enhance the department's effectiveness in the area of communications. A receptionist will be available during all operating hours to respond to citizen inquiries and concerns.

2) **Efficiency and Effectiveness**

Accomplishments:

- a) A Behavior Management Plan was developed to establish guidelines for bus drivers and school administrators when processing a student bus conduct referral. Bus drivers are charged with initiating a proactive role in student discipline by contacting parents and maintaining good communication skills with school administrators.
- b) A transportation leadership team has been identified to chart the course and direction of the Transportation Department. The leadership team consists of administrators, coordinators and lead drivers. Input from the team is solicited on issues large and small to insure optimal efficiency. Specific issues are worked to reach a resolution.
- c) Staff meetings are held for Pupil Transportation leadership and support personnel weekly to ensure that everyone is aware of operational needs, projects and processes.
- d) The Director of Pupil Transportation attended a Leading, Educating and Developing training session at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Instruction in January. Other subordinates are now participating in the county/schools Leadership Institute.
- e) To refine the payroll process, bus drivers and monitors were issued a 183-day contract. The additional three days in their contract included compensation for in-service, initial route review, first aid/CPR and defensive driving training. The results of the individual route reviews were utilized to determine the total hours for a driver's contracted time. Also, congested traffic areas were factored into a driver's contracted time. Additionally, five make-up days were identified prior to the start of the school year.
- f) A file storage system for personnel files has been purchased. Current files have been purged and assembled in the same format as utilized within the Human Resources Department.

- g) A pamphlet identifying specific information relevant to transportation for special needs students was provided to each special needs parent. In addition, a copy of the bus conduct rules was provided to each mainstream parent. All parents received a welcome letter from the bus driver identifying the goal of the Transportation Department, which is to provide each student with a high level of service. These processes will be continued for the 2004-2005 school year.
- h) Through a joint effort involving the Transportation Department, Special Education Department, Technology Department, Instruction Department and school administrative designees, new procedures for identifying and tracking requests for transportation services for special needs students has been developed and implemented.
- i) The addition of a new administrative position to specifically supervise Special Education Transportation has clearly yielded more timely and efficient service. The performance of the Special Needs Route Coordinator was monitored. The employee was presented with a mid-year evaluation and progress report and presently meets satisfactory performance standards.
- j) School administrators are insuring that school bus arrival and departure times are documented and forwarded to the Transportation Department. By doing so route adjustments are made more promptly.
- k) Greater efforts have been made to recruit new bus drivers (radio ads, newsletters, banners, larger ads in local newspapers, PTO's, substitute orientations). New initiatives for recruiting are currently being sought.
- l) Mid-year evaluations were initiated with drivers who have experienced attendance problems and other performance issues.

- m) An in-service training session for bus drivers and monitors was held on April 26. Mr. Jon Bachman, a retired administrator from Prince William County Schools, made a presentation on Student Behavior Management. His presentation theme was "How to Make Students Mind, Without Losing Yours".
- n) Bus drivers and monitors completed a comprehensive compensation and benefit study. The survey results yielded significant interest in the implementation of some form of a retirement benefit.
- o) Customer service training has been provided for all staff members. Emphasis has been placed on improving tone, tactfulness and overall positive communication skills. Improvement of these skills is most relevant to those who are resolving day-to-day issues with our customers.
- p) Pupil Transportation administrators attended monthly principal meetings this school year. This provided an ongoing opportunity to address and resolve issues and opened a better flow of communication.
- q) A placard to display the actual bus number that another is substituting for was placed on seventy-five buses. The concept is good and provides school personnel with accurate bus numbers upon arrival at bus stops and to schools. Additional placards will be purchased and placed on the remaining buses.
- r) The campaign to maintain citizen awareness concerning where and when bus and route information will be available along with the "register early" campaign is ongoing for the 2004-2005 school year.
- s) The Director of Transportation made presentations to elementary school PTO organizations identifying the general transportation operation. The opportunity was used to introduce the director and to answer specific questions about the transportation operation. Each Lead Driver will continue with the presentations at their respective elementary schools this fall.

- t) The Director of Pupil Transportation was interviewed on WFVA on two occasions last year to discuss: the process for preparing bus routes for a new year and inclement weather closing and delayed opening procedures.
- u) Job descriptions for the Director and Assistant Director of Pupil Transportation, Special Needs Service Delivery Coordinator and all remaining coordinator positions and lead drivers have been revised and redefined to identify leadership responsibilities.

Efficiency and Effectiveness Under Development:

- a) While customer service has been a department focus and extensive training has been provided, we are continuing to refine the skills of some employees in this area. Our customers deserve a courteous and timely response regardless of the circumstances.
- b) As previously stated a part-time receptionist will be hired to ensure an immediate and personal response to citizen inquiries during all operating hours.
- c) Continue to develop the customer service theme by providing additional individual and group training experiences.
- d) All staff will receive diversity training at the summer in-service on August 24.
- e) The transportation operations leadership and support teams will be required to attend team-building exercises.
- f) Special needs bus monitors are an essential element in providing transportation for and attending to the special needs of the students. All bus monitors attend a twenty hour training course prior to being hired and must have first aid/CPR certification. Bus monitors did receive a small additional salary adjustment in the FY 2005 budget. However, additional compensation will be proposed in the FY 2006 budget to help the recruitment and retention of the highest caliber of bus monitor.

- g) School bus video camera systems have proven to be a valuable asset. Twenty-two additional video camera systems will be installed on buses this summer. The goal is to have a camera system on each bus. Additional camera systems will be included in the FY 2006 budget requests.
- h) A retreat will be scheduled this summer for the Transportation Leadership Team.

3) **Policies and Procedures**

Accomplishments:

- a) A software program is in place to select drivers for field trips on a rotating and equitable basis. Complaints from bus drivers referencing unequal trip distribution are practically non-existent.
- b) Strict adherence to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles' standard which states drivers must pass a physical examination before being issued a contract insures qualified drivers are transporting our students. The employee must provide past medical history, previous absenteeism for medical purposes and equipment restriction information to the physician prior to administering the physical.

Under Development:

- a) A Transportation Department Policy and Procedures Manual is being developed. The manual, which will include a standard operating procedure for each support position and will correspond with the Virginia Department of Education Regulations Governing Pupil Transportation. Protocols for the assignment of new buses and routes will be established. The manual will be distributed to staff in August 2004.
- b) A committee has been established to review SCSB Policy 6-10, which identifies the emergency closing and delayed opening procedures. The committee will formulate and make recommendations regarding any additions or deletions to the current policy. The committee meets for a second time on June 22.

- c) A bus driver training manual is being finalized. The manual will contain all pertinent information a trainee needs to complete for the Virginia Department of Education training curriculum.
- d) Review the results of the FY05 pilot program to be established for the School Nutrition Department in regards to a matching fund, supplemental retirement program for employees. Look at the possibility of presenting a like program for bus drivers and monitors in the FY 06 operating budget.
- e) Review the results of the survey presented to bus drivers and monitors in regards to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the department.
- f) The non-exempt support service employee's evaluation form is being revised to include job specific narratives for bus drivers and monitors. The revised form will be presented to staff at the in-service meeting prior to the start of the 2004-2005 school year.
- g) A new application form for bus drivers and monitors is being revised to include specific position related information will be in use soon.
- h) The lease of four activity buses and positions for full-time field trip drivers has been approved in the FY 2005 operating budget. These buses and drivers will substantially reduce the costs of charter bus services presently absorbed for athletic and other group transportation and will assist the transportation of our athletic teams. It's anticipated that additional field trip buses and drivers will be requested in the FY 2006 budget requests.

Summary

The Lead Drivers continue to be a great asset to the Pupil Transportation Department. They serve as the communications link and liaison between the bus drivers, parents and school administrators. A team concept strategy for bus drivers and monitors will be initiated with the 2004-2005 school year. Each Lead Driver has been identified as a team leader. The goal of each team will be to enhance the overall efficiency of the department and to improve attendance.

Route Coordinators will be carefully reviewing each route in preparation for the 2004-2005 school year. Pertinent issues that prompt parental concerns, i.e., route consistencies, walking distances, traffic assessment, bus stop locations and overall safety factors will be reviewed.

The current Virginia Department of Education School Bus Driver Training Curriculum requires all new drivers to receive specialized instruction in the transportation of Special Needs students. Since approximately only 25% of enrolled special needs students are transported on special buses, we will be requiring all bus drivers to receive the specialized training for transporting students with special needs.

Transportation administrators will be assessing the office space needs for the department. If deemed necessary for the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the department, additional office space recommendations will be requested and recommended through the Capitol Improvement Plan as applicable.

The Pupil Transportation Department is excited about the positive changes that have been initiated. The future for the Pupil Transportation Department is bright as policies, procedures and attitudes are changing. We must not lose sight of our ultimate goal, which is to always provide safe, efficient and on-time transportation for all students. To assist with meeting our goal a campaign will continue to recruit, train and maintain the highest quality and caliber of school bus drivers, monitors and administrative support personnel.